

EUROPEAN MIGRATIONS AND THEIR GOVERNMENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF WWII

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

European Migrations and Their Governments in the Context of WWII. (May 2014)

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“It is well known that human beings are complex, multi-faceted, contradictory, and full of surprises, but it takes a time of war or great upheaval in order to see it,” (Némirovsky, 363). When Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coasts of the United States in 2005, various shades of human behaviors surfaced. Some people sought to help their neighbors or community by providing aid, while others robbed the convenience store down the street to get provisions for themselves or family out of panic. All of these people waited for immediate government assistance that, arguably, was not prepared for such a natural disaster. Crisis like natural disasters and war cause massive land migrations of people, leaving their homes for other regions around them. Unfortunately, these regions are rarely prepared for such an influx of people. Entering the question, “What is the government’s role in this?”

A government’s action or inaction in critical situations like these means the difference in overall prevention of destruction. Specifically, this work will analyze how the Third Republic of France and the Nazi government of Germany during WWII reacted to, and relayed information to its

people about, the enemy forces that invaded their homelands. Nationalism, propaganda, and political pressures contributed to the consequential actions of the two governments in similar, yet differing ways. All the while, these government decrees, sanctions, and laws affect their respective citizens and, in turn, effectively aid the two massive migrations of people within these two very different countries and societies.

DEDICATION

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

WWII was not a war fought solely on the battlefields, but it was incredibly present on the “home front,” arguably more so than any other previous war in Europe. Citizens and cities increasingly became tactical pivots for the opposing armies (Diamond, 11). German civilians as well as French civilians experienced traumatizing effects of WWII, such as unpredictable bombings, deportations to labor camps, and migrations away from their homes to avoid the invading military forces. My research will identify the similarities and differences between the migration of Parisians in May 1940 southward and the migration of Germans from Breslau, Silesia in February 1945 westward to central Germany as they are affected by their socio-political ideologies. My goal with this research is to magnify the similarities that thematically draw the two migrations together, although they are separated by five years’ time, geography, and ideologies.

The similarities roughly equal the differences of these exoduses. Similarities include: retreating soldiers intermixing with fleeing civilians, trains not being able to keep up with the demands of the masses, people fleeing out of fear of the invading army forces as fueled by propaganda, both cities were considered “fortress cities,” and many evacuees from other nations filed through and mixed in with civilians from the two cities. The differences only exist when discussing political strategies of the two regimes and their cultural ideologies paired with existing social structures.

One might infer that due to the Nazi regime control, all German citizens supported the regime or that Hitler cared for all German people. But, this was not the case, as many Germans did not take

Hitler's speeches and propagandized posters seriously during the early stages of the German retreat. These people did not trust what their government was claiming about great victories being won and how "Germany is stronger than ever!" when in fact, it was at its weakest point. By the end of WWII, scholars have determined the total number of displaced Germans to be 12,448,000 (Bessel, 419). Regarding Breslau alone, 18,000 of its civilians died in one week while fleeing the Soviet Army and another 25,000 died while the city was under attack (Hargreaves, vii). Nazi leaders had "urged [the Silesian population] to stand fast...in particular the radical Gauleiter and Reich Defence Commissar in Breslau, Karl Hanke, maintained until the last moment that the German population was in no immediate danger," (Bessel, 76). Why did Hitler abandon his people on the Eastern front with the invading Red Army? Why weren't the evacuation plans implemented earlier than they were? Did this delay have anything to do with their reigning political ideology?

When regarding the French migration, was there an evacuation plan to follow? Was this evacuation more or less "civilized" than the Eastern German evacuation? Why was the timing of evacuation so different between the two, as the Parisians heeded the reality of inevitable occupation and hastily fled from Paris, but the Silesians were caught in a battle? And while the Parisians were given evacuation instructions by multiple blackboards posted throughout the city, this departure was no less chaotic than the Breslau evacuation. When transportation outlets such as taxis and trains were either gone, all being used already, or not running due to technical difficulties such as a lack of petrol, families became desperate. Interestingly, in books like Irène Némirovsky's *Suite Française* and Hanna Diamond's *Fleeing Hitler*, a few firsthand accounts of the Parisian exodus remark on how uncivilized this throng of people have quickly become even

though, “From the outset departure was intensely class-based,” and somewhat divided (Diamond, 54). Both the Breslau evacuees and Parisian evacuees experienced death on the roads they were traveling, but the timing of the Breslau exodus proved detrimental. While Parisians faced a summer heat that “overpowered,” the people, the Silesians faced a murderous winter that literally froze many in their tracks.

Two peoples of differing ideologies, political agendas, and social constructions are put in frighteningly similar conditions and are left with dramatically different results. The goal with this research is to find the link between the social or cultural structure of a society and the political agendas of regimes and in so doing, prove how this relationship is imperative to determining the success or failure of mobilizing a people during chaotic environments, such as war. My hope would be that this research could then be applied to current wartime refugee and evacuation trauma.

CHAPTER II

MILITARY AGENDAS

When discussing the military tactics of a certain military regime, one must be aware of the prevailing ideology that is assumed and embedded within the military system and its leaders, as each regime is different from another. A look at the French and German military regime strategies during and leading up to WWII must be analyzed through the lens of underlying political motivations, the prevailing theory of ‘a nation in arms’ that exists within that nation, and the culture that is developed out of that nation’s military history. It would be most beneficial to start with the later and use the French and German military history to discuss and thus better understand the military culture that the respective leaders of WWII were born into, as political motivations and the theory of a ‘nation in arms’ effectively explain the military strategies.

France: A Government’s Action

As French military history is much involved and covers thousands of years, it’s most beneficial to focus on the wars that most immediately affect the actions of WWII, which are the Franco-Prussian War and WWI. “The Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune were decisive factors in the history of the nation in arms,” (Challener, 31). Militarily, while there became an apparent need after the Franco-Prussian war that mandatory military conscription was needed to produce a successful army, the social implications of the 1870 defeat by the Prussians led to a shift in French mentality in regards to the ‘nation’ as an idea and as an institution. According to the reporter for the National Assembly, Marquis de Chasseloup-Laubat, “The war had been the work of Providence, which had acted so as to teach Frenchmen to do better,” (Challener, 34). Doing better in this case would be to build up a sizeable military army through conscription.

Challener discusses two ways to define a ‘nation in arms,’ one by, “the number of men under arms or subject to mobilization,” and the second by, “military strategies being brought in line with republican military theories,” (Challener, 46-47). The French military grew in size from half a million after 1870 to 3,500,000 by 1914.¹ In this physical sense, France became a nation in arms rather quickly. In regards to military theories, the French military was now by 1905 viewed as not only a, “fighting force but as a school in which French youth acquired basic principles of citizenship,” (Challener, 47). Now, military thought becomes integrated into social mentality as a French collective body. This fostered the rebirth of a more moral and nationalistic France from pre-1870 mentalities, as the Third Republic is born of the defeat. Alongside of this growth in numbers, there is a shift in economic industry as France experiences gains and losses during and after the Great Depression. With France’s economic industrial growth, “stopping short of a full-scale industrial revolution,” it did not grow with the same intensity as the economies of Britain or Germany (“France”). This statement serves to highlight the various conflicts within a new, prospering economy that is forced to coexist with traditional means of production of specialized goods. Traditional means of production in France include the use of specialized, skilled labor that was used for wine making and the production of other fine goods traditionally produced in France. This tradition of specialization slightly hindered France’s economy in regards to mass production outputs. While efforts were made to incorporate new weapons technologies, the delay of pursuing industrial progress can be contrasted with the rising German Empire during the same time period. “But by 1935 industrial production had fallen to 79 percent of the 1928 level and exports to 55 percent. Registered unemployment hovered at less than 500,000, but this figure concealed the fact that many urban workers were subsisting on family farms owned by relatives.

¹ Statistics were taken by Challener, pp. 46-47, from Colonel Joseph Revol, *Histoire de l’armée française* (Paris: Larousse, 1929), pp. 203-04.

Besides, the French exported much of their unemployment; thousands of immigrant workers lost their work permits and had to return home. Not until 1938–39 did a measure of recovery set in, thanks to Reynaud’s business-oriented policies plus the stimulus of rearmament. By the time war broke out again, France had barely returned to the pre-Depression level.” (“France”).

The French military goal was not to participate in an arms race due to the prevailing ideology of “a nation in arms,” during the period just before 1938. The goal was to develop, “defensive warfare, to the exclusion of other, and possibly more fruitful, military concepts,” (Challener, 216). In the aftermath of WWI, France’s main concern in regards to military strategy was to fix whatever mistakes were made, including increasing the availability and efficiency of moving goods and supplies to military units needing them. These highly defensive systems of action centered on the widely held notion by French military theorists that any eminent German attack would not quickly result in their victory (Challner 216). This created a smooth transition as a state from peace to war and from war to peace (Challener, 198). Mobilization of all government agencies, utilization of various transportation methods, and communication methods from government actors to civil authorities were key elements discussed in this strategy. This set of wartime measures, called the Paul-Bancour law, was constructed by the *Conseil Supérieur d la Défense Nationale* and developed by Maginot and Painlevé (Challener, 194). This law rested on the principle that, “in a world where war appeared to have become total, the military power of the nation was directly proportional to its organized economic and industrial strength,” (Challener, 214). Had this legislation been passed, there would have been significant attention turned to providing a steady flow of arms by production workers to the soldiers at the front. When discussing the French government’s actions and communication with its people during the

migration of 1939, it can be said that measures were put into place for quick, organized, and decisive action to be taken. This decisive action would include the mobilization of all government agencies; however, while some political leaders supported the use of every, “individual and every resource...in the defense effort,” several military leaders wanted to keep the separation of, “soldier and citizen,” (Challener, 210). These political leaders rested on the history of French civilian reserves who proved their patriotism and ability to help defend the country during WWI. However, these measures were not immediately put into place at the start of WWII because of the nine-month period that existed between September 3, 1939 and May 10, 1940, called the Phony War.

During these months, the civilians and the military, arguably, were in a state of complacency resulting from an, “uncanny lack of activity on the front,” (Diamond, 25). The anticipated aerial attacks and bombing raids didn’t happen immediately, so the French people were unsuspecting of anything that would truly cause a fear for their own safety. “The people began to accommodate themselves to the situation,” as the, “need for evacuation had to be seen to be unnecessary,” (Diamond, 24-25). Furthering the argument that France relied heavily on defensive strategies, fortifications such as the Maginot Line were pivotal tactical points. The fortifications, “appeared vital; acting as a steel and concrete *couverture*, they would not only reinforce the army but would also provide the nation with sufficient time to mobilize all of its military establishment,” (Challener, 223). As some French military leaders did not take into account the advanced offensive technologies that Germany had invested in, the Maginot line and the Ardennes Forest were broken through in five days. Charles de Gaulle, however, insisted that, “The logic of the nation in arms would condemn France to wage an almost endless, grinding war

of attrition,” (Challener, 248). Charles de Gaulle also criticized the French military’s focus on building a mass army and not one that is necessarily well trained². Not heeding advice from the arguably more progressive thinking de Gaulle, the French government continued to build on their defensive strategies. While the French had a planned system of evacuation, it did not take into account the rate at which the French Army’s fortifications would fall or the failure of their military strategies, as failure was not something a nation like France wanted to admit was an option. Thus, the altogether embarrassing defeat came as a shock to the French people and further contributed to the traumatic event that was the migration of 1940.

Germany in Retreat

Just after the Nazi defeat on the Eastern front line at Stalingrad, Russia in February 1943, the Germans experienced a long trek back west in a massive retreat that left many outlying German civilians to either stay and defend their city from the invading Russians or to flee. The decision to stay or flee was a confusing one to make, one self-preserving option with many supposed securities and one with a moral responsibility to protect, “greater Germany.” It’s worth mentioning here that if the case is true that a human’s first instinct is self-preservation and not self-sacrifice, there has to be at some level an outside indoctrination of ideals that allows the ‘greater good’ to surpass the importance of self. Based on this assumption, references to Germany’s military history and theories of a ‘nation in arms’ are needed to solidify my assertion that Hitler’s military strategies and how he conducted civilian affairs is birthed from previous, glamorized German military victories and the Nazi nationalism that was created from this edited history. We can see this edited history throughout Hitler’s work, *Mein Kampf*, where he

² Taken from Challener, Richard D., *The French Theory of the Nation in Arms (1866-1939)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955) pp. 248-249.

discusses the underlying reasons for his country's financial burdens and the defeat of WWI, the Jewish people. Hitler's past experiences as a soldier for Germany in WWI and the personal implications of such a defeat, including the loss of camaraderie and the realities of German defeat which fueled him to pursue community with others like-minded, and then power, in politics. It can be said that Hitler's private motivations were easily aligned with the Nazi Party's racist, socialist agenda. The two became inseparable. As Hitler rose to become the Fuhrer of the National Socialist Party, he wanted it to be, "organized like a government itself so that when power was achieved and democracy was legitimately ended, this 'government in waiting' could slip right into place," (Galvin). Alongside of the many bureaus that were established during the war, many government officials were elected to these positions and moved around given their allegiance to Hitler and to the Party. However, with these new officials and this new 'government,' there was not a new constitution or any preparation for Nazi longevity.

With new territorial expansions, Hitler would put into power a *Gauleiter*, or governor, who would have power over the "German" civilians in major regions and cities. In the case of Breslau and other "Fortress" cities, these governors facilitated the propaganda, press releases, and speeches being delivered from Hitler in Germany. Thus, communication was incredibly important between Hitler and his governors in the outer reaches of his empire.

However, at the start of the great retreat in 1943 and the hasty approach of Allied forces 1944, Hitler grew more nervous and called for the implementation of the *Volkstrum*³. While using the Volkstrum units provided men for the German military to use, Hitler failed to provide adequate

³ *Volkstrum* is defined as, "the civilian population, alongside the Wehrmacht, [who] would defend 'fortress' cities to the last drop of blood." (Bessel, 16).

material support in the form of ammunition, weapons, and training resources. “Far from emanating strength, calling up old men and boys showed that the Reich was morally bankrupt,” (Hargreaves, 29). In Breslau specifically, the history of civilian soldiers can be seen most directly with the Mongol invasion of central Europe in 1241. Again referencing the edited history of Germany, according to the Nazis, “In the wake of the Mongol invasion, Third Reich histories proclaimed, ‘Breslau was built anew by German settlers as a German city and has remained so until present day,” (Hargreaves, 11). So, with the ill-equipped Volkstrum in use in ‘fortress’ cities that are about to be engulfed by the encroaching Red Army and experiencing embarrassing defeats there, Hitler orders for the bridges over the Oder River to be blown. This effectively isolates those German civilians that are east of that river and makes them incredibly defenseless against the Russian ‘Mongols.’ This lack of concern for his people is further illustrated in Hitler’s failure to provide adequate means of transportation for the fleeing German civilians from Breslau. “Wehremacht leadership did not pay any care for civilians as well as their soldiers,” (Bessel, 35). The mention of ‘soldiers’ here serves to highlight the reality of German military units began to retreat with the civilians during January and February 1945. However, should a soldier be caught without his unit and he was not on his way to meet up with his unit, he would be shot for desertion.

Similarities and Differences

Similarities between the French and German military strategies include the usage of the Loire and Oder Rivers as natural defensive fortifications from the respective invading forces. The key importance of war history and the enculturation and perpetuation of that collective memory is

also prevalent in both cases, shown in the references to the Franco-Prussian War, WWI for France, and the Mongol invasion of 1241 for Germany. During their respective retreats, both militaries became unorganized and it was not unusual to find soldiers intermixing with civilians who were fleeing. The German soldiers, however, were killed by firing squad if they were suspected of desertion, which happened frequently (Bessel, 63).

Differences simply include the structure of the respective militaries in regards to official positions, the type of military strategy used at the start of the war and how it shifted once on the retreat, and lastly the rate at which the two militaries prepared for war, industrially. These differences proved to be crucial when regarding the causes of the two migrations, as it is because of these differences that the two migrations are so distinct from one another when they are both essentially the same experience.

CHAPTER III

POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES

By approaching the political motivations of the failing French Third Republic and bolstering National Socialist Party in Germany, it is beneficial to take into consideration the historical events that take place before the civilian migrations so as to understand the foundations that were laid for the ever present political complexities that existed during that time of chaos. By understanding the historical foundations, such as the political sentiment that developed from the First World War, it is possible then to move onto the internal organization of power within each political institution and see how each level of organization had its particular importance to the main goal of each regime. Consequentially, upon deciphering the many political orders issued to civilians before, during, and after the respective exoduses, there is space to fill in the history with the underlying social tensions and norms that existed as a launch pad for various orders to be executed.

With the arrival of 1931, the French Third Republic experienced the economically devastating effects of the Great Depression, which helped lead France towards political instability. Concern over Germany's election of Adolf Hitler just two years later in 1933 aided this political upheaval in France, as right-wing movements sought to take control of the weakened but consolidated, left-wing, Third Republic in the 1936 formation of the Front Populaire. Through the back and forth uncertainty of Leon Blum's Leftist government in the midst of Anti-Semitic rightist parties, "there can be no doubt that in 1939 the French people went to war with a listless reluctance that in no way resembled the spirit of any previous generation," (Challener, 220). As Germany is recovering from debilitating sanctions imposed on them by the Allied powers' Treaty of

Versailles and the devastating Depression, there existed a power vacuum within the German political party system. When Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933, he was not met with tremendous support from the German people, “[as] only five years before [1933], just one in every hundred Breslauers had supported the National Socialists,” (Hargreaves, 15). However, with the devastation of the economic crises of the 1920’s and early 1930’s, many voted for the National Socialist party and their promises of economic recovery. Both societies arguably experienced similar feelings of uneasiness and unpreparedness of what was to come from not only their representative governments, but also World War II as a whole.

Politics of the Third Republic

Within the mid-1930’s, France began to slowly increase military spending and extending conscriptions from one-year requirements to two years of mandatory service. However, the military ideology rested firmly on their Eastern defensive fortifications, such as the Maginot Line (Challener, 224). To the frustration of Colonel Charles de Gaulle, Leon Blum refuted any proposition that would enhance the French military offensive force with a professional army, as any monetary spending should rest on improving internal economy and the tradition of a ‘nation in arms.’ To explore further the reasons behind Leon Blum’s refusal to support the contemporary notion of a professional army and a mechanized military force, we must look at the internal dynamics of the Third Republic system of government. Specifically, we must observe the organization of power within the structure, the existing Anti-Semitic sentiments, and the people’s perception of their government leading up to and during the massive exodus out of northern France.

Leon Blum came into power with the Popular Front, a coalition of left-wing parties such as the Communist Party, Socialist Party, and Radical Party, after the Great Depression when France was experiencing frequent changeovers between political parties. Blum's socialist party developed reforms such as the forty-hour workweek, restructuring banks, and an annual two-week's paid leave for workers, among many more. It's worth noting that this vacation time allowed for internal tourism to take place in France, opening up beautiful beaches and resorts that were once held for the French elite, to the public. This signaled a shift in behavior between social classes and a resentment that would be present in the conforming of all social classes together on the roads during the massive exodus, written about in Irene Némirovsky's novel, *Suite Française*. After Blum's resignation and the Front Populaire's collapse, a new government began to take shape. In April of 1938, what was left of the Front swayed significantly to the right as Daladier's signing of the Munich Pact and a virtual break from the Front's leftist traditions and reforms, led to the over emphasis of the defensive military strategy and false hope that Germany wouldn't attack France through the 'impassible' Maginot line (Whitman). "The political Left, drawing its conclusions from nonmilitary reasoning, tied a host of political, economic, and psychological factors into the popular concept of the nation in arms and made it a stereotype," (Challener, 256). All of this government history has been presented here, I would argue, to provide a basis for government hesitation in preventative action when detailing orders to Frenchmen and women about fleeing Paris, a French fortress city. Indicatively, politicians and military strategists of the post-1918 era believed that France itself was a fortress behind the Maginot Line and its 'nation in arms.' "Whereas the general theory of the nation in arms led to no set military form, the particular post-1918 theory led to the creation of an inadequate military form and provided a rationale to preserve the status quo," (Challener, 256). This is again why the

invasion of France and the need for rapid evacuation was unforeseen and shocking; no one was prepared for it because no one wanted to believe it could actually happen.

The uncertainty and short-sightedness that plagued the government actors in France leading up to May of 1940 was reflected in its people, as many prepared for imminent invasion after the declaration of war, but only came to a nine-month long waiting period known as the Phony War. During this time, Germany's military gained many victories and surprised the French with their swift advances, but even this was not enough to warn the French people. "The French propaganda machine kept the full extent of the [French] army's collapse out of the public domain, so most were able to pass off this apparently 'temporary' success for the Germans as a consequence of their superior military force...and their willingness to resort to cruelty and uncivilized methods," (Diamond, 8). The French government, specifically Prime minister Paul Reynaud, would even play off of Germany's previous invasions of France and use it to comfort the French people, by saying, "France has been invaded a hundred times and never beaten...our belief in victory is intact," (Diamond, 8). Government propaganda sought to not only reaffirm the French identity in the 'nation in arms' to its people, but also to its government officials themselves. Propaganda also had a double affect, one of instilling fear into the French civilians who read newspapers and listen to radio correspondences, and keeping alive the German 'atrocities' that existed during the French invasion during the First World War. Northern Frenchmen and Belgians that were passing through Paris would bring stories of the "viciousness," of the German soldier (Diamond, 12). The French people were also very aware through magazines and headlines of new bombing techniques, as shown in the Spanish Civil War, so there was constant fear of German air raids (Diamond, 9).

Alongside of propaganda and these socially facilitated fears, what political orders or communications sparked the massive migration of people from northern France and how did the government relay pertinent information to its civilians? This is an interesting question to discuss, as the Third Republic had already established various agencies and businesses that would mobilize in a defensive strategy should France be in a time of crisis, as before mentioned. According to Hannah Diamond, the mobilization plan established by the French government, mentioned on page 11 of this work, ended up being uncoordinated and clumsy in execution. “The government struggled to balance the manpower needs of the military with what was required to keep the essential war industries going. At first the number of men exempted from mobilization and allocated the status of specially designated worker was overestimated,” (Diamond, 16). These men were sent to factories in Paris, which would have a sizable affect on the evacuation movement of people through the city. With the declaration of war on Germany on September 3, 1939, Daladier immediately began to build up the prowess of the Maginot defensive line, but when the Maginot line fell embarrassingly quickly, Daladier resigned from his post on March 20, 1940 and allowed for his successor, Paul Reynaud, to take control of the crumbling government (Whitman). In the midst of the fall of the Maginot line, we see a French public who accepted the myth that the Maginot line was impenetrable and then was suddenly affronted by the reality in which they now lived, which naturally leads to uncertainty and panic. This naivety was reflected in the politicians’ view of air invasion, as many of the senate remembered the Allied forces’, “superiority in the air,” and thought that the Second World War would be fought in similar fashion to WWI (Diamond, 18). It is interesting to note that, “suggestions that the evacuation of large numbers of people might be necessary were simply

dismissed as a defeatist position, out of line with the aura of confidence that surrounded all planning for the impending hostilities,” (Diamond, 18). This supports the claim that the level of honest communication between the government existed in a cloud of uncertainty, masked with the false pretenses of propaganda and their memory of past wars. The safety of France’s people was simply not a serious concern at the time, as *departements*⁴ were notified of the amount of allotted refugees that were to be temporarily housed there (Diamond, 18). However, these plans that the government had made to support an exodus did not take into account the density of transportation from these northern *departements* and the inability to support a large amount of civilian migrants. Much of the evacuation plans were directed towards the people nearest to the battle front by the Maginot line, so large interior cities were not as prepared as some others for evacuation. For those who evacuated, “under the official plans [established by the government] and...went to their allocated department,” received benefits, such as monetary stipends. Upon the declaration of war in 1939, 550,000 Parisians left the city, but it was only a fraction of people that were there (Diamond, 23-24).

While official measures were taken to prepare the French for evacuation, the measurement of how many civilians would actually be evacuating was severely undershot. I assert that this failure in the French Third Republic’s ability to plan for such an evacuation was hindered by its collective dismissal of modern warfare, as it had adapted and mechanized since WWI, and its inclination to rely on its past victories and theory of a ‘nation in arms’. For the French, the real test of infrastructure and government radio addresses would come after the Phony War’s end in May of 1940. However, by dissecting the political changes and theories that accompanied

⁴ *Departement* is a French term for “county” or “territorial division” within the country.

wartime events over the decade before the declaration of war in 1939, we are now able to look at the motives and reactions of the migrating, French civilians to their government's actions more accurately and critically.

The Nazi Party Culture

As the exodus from Breslau in eastern Germany occurs in 1945, less emphasis will be placed on the political events that gave rise to Hitler's Chancellorship in the early 1930's, but will be placed on the shift of his political ideology from the height of the regime's power to its rapid demise near the end of WWII. Specifically, government ordinances and flows of power to the outer reaches of the expanding German empire will be looked at more so than those of the interior. Geographically, Breslau is located in Silesia (or modern-day Poland) and has its roots in history as a 'fortress city' dating back to 1241. It is seen as a historically 'German' city that was birthed out of its defiance of Mongol invasion (Hargreaves, 11). It gradually became a key trading center, "between East and west, and goods from the Netherlands, Hungary, Russia, southern Germany, Prussia, and Poland were exchanged at its markets, [thus earning] the trappings of a great city and gained the title *die Blume Europas*- the flower of Europe," (Hargreaves, 11). Because of its early history for defense, which lined up with Hitler's political and military ideology, and its geo-strategically prodigious location, Breslau became a key focal point in Hitler's conquest of the East. This celebrated history of Breslau's fortitude and revolt against Mongol later Napoleonic invaders was proliferated by Third Reich historians and propagandists in Silesia. Economically, as an incredibly productive industrial town, Breslau and its surrounding region became Germany's key economic supplier of resources such as coal, during the critical stages of the Industrial Revolution. However, after the breakup of the German

Empire, the Polish majority of the Silesian population wanted to rejoin the, “reborn Polish state,” after WWI (Hargreaves, 13-14). With this social partition of Germans and Poles within the region and the economic disaster of the Depression, Breslau was in a state of desolation as a once economic and socially affluent area became poor. Only because of this economic situation and with Hitler’s promise of German rehabilitation, many Breslauers voted to support the National Socialist Party in 1933.

The organization of government during the height of the Nazi regime in Breslau took no strictly organized form, but only placed Nazi government officials as head of various departments within the whole of the regime. “There was a myriad of high-ranking individual offices, government departments, ministries, agencies, and security forces- but there was no Nazi constitution or no clear framework or division of powers...there seemed to be no long-term planning,” (Llewellyn). One of these high-ranking government officials, Karl Hanke, was assigned to be the *Gauliter*⁵ of Breslau. Once the Nazi Party had won the governmental race in 1933, “the Nazis set about putting their stamp on the city immediately. Civic posts, such as the regional president and mayors, were quickly filled with Party members,” (Hargreaves, 15). Within the city, smaller offices, such as an office of Propaganda, were established to be extensions of the larger Nazi system. Loud speakers were set up all around the city, so Germans could hear their Chancellor’s speeches and decrees. Up until the middle of WWII, Breslau was a vibrant destination city within the Nazi Empire, seen as the Aryan intellectual and social epicenter of Eastern Germany. What with its roughly 10,000 strong Jewish population being rapidly deported from the city around 1938, it became the ‘ideal’ destination city for Nazi government officials to vacation to.

⁵ *Gauliter*: Defined as a “district leader in Nazi Germany who served as a provincial governor. *Gau*- “Party district” and *Liter*- “leader” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

This elimination of the Jewish population in regions like Silesia was a part of the “General Plan East [sought to reorganize] eastern Europe and western Soviet Union [where the goal was to] eliminate 30 million or more Slavs and the settlement of their territories by German overlords who would control and eventually repopulate the area with Germans,” (“Germany”).

Taking a closer look into the government’s actions surrounding the ‘turn’ of WWII, where Russian forces launched their offensive and sent Germany on a quick retreat back westward, it is clear to see how the Nazi government in Breslau prepared or did not prepare for the evacuation of German civilians there. The sting of German defeat at Stalingrad in 1943 signaled concern for the German offensive strategy for Hitler (“Germany”). Hanke and other *Gauleiters* were ordered by the central offices to build up fortifications of Breslau, which in most cases civilians of Breslau and migrant workers from regions newly conquered by the Germans in the east, (Hargreaves, 27). These fortifications did not hold up to the Allied forces air raid on October 7, 1944, where Breslau was faced with its first major, physiologically personal even, attack of WWII (Hargreaves, 28). Upon this attack, Hanke addressed the city of over 100,000 Breslauers and called for a movement of civilians to rise up and become the ‘citizen-soldiers’ of Germany, the *Volksstrum* (Hargreaves, 29). These last chance efforts issued by Nazi government leaders and propagandists reflect how unorganized their structure of government actually was when plans needed to be established for the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of people from Silesia. In fact, only when physically seeing the Russian invading forces in the distance, almost surrounding Breslau, did government give the official decree through loudspeaker:

“The civilian populace must evacuate every district of Breslau east of the Oder immediately. The Oder bridges in the city are

being prepared for demolition by engineers. Every inhabitant in the eastern part of town must leave his house immediately and proceed on foot to the western side of the city where every step has been taken to prepare for arrival,” (Hargreaves, 73).

Knowing that this effort had not entirely taken place and that western Breslau could not hold these refugees, the head of the Propaganda office’s deputy, Carl Wichmann, declared that, “at such times, the fate of individuals does not matter,” (Hargreaves, 73).

Let this serve to indicate the lack of planning by the Nazi government to provide expedient and safe routes to safety for evacuating German people from Breslau. This lack of planning and infrastructure to support the mass exodus is emblematic in other regions of Silesia as well. I assert that this failure to plan for such a massive, decidedly lethal event is found in the German prevailing political ideology, or Nazism, which crippled itself under the weight of propaganda and a lack of organizational structure within its government.

Similarities and Differences

While both political entities, the Third Republic and Third Reich, failed to deliver a cohesive and organized plan of evacuation due to their respective ideologies, which in fact blinded them to the realities of invading forces; I assert that their specific situations differ in relation to their ideologies. The French government relied on their past experiences and victorious military strategies of the Franco-Prussian War and WWI to determine how to prepare for WWII, mistaking it to be fought in a similar style like that of WWI. With investing in defensive

strategies and weaponry specifically designed to fortify such a defensive political stance, France was left in shock when fortifications like these and the Maginot Line failed almost immediately and their “fortress city” Paris was occupied by the invading Germans. They failed, not because of a lack of military preparedness, but in strategic preparedness and psychological preparedness. In this way, the Third Republic’s demise resembles the Third Reich’s demise. The failure in Breslau by the Third Reich was not one of military strategy per se. It was more so the regime being blinded by their own ideology, their belief that Germany would prevail and its perfect race would ultimately achieve European Hegemony. Due to fear and other implications, members of the government and the people themselves could not and would not entertain the idea of defeat or withdrawing from advancing Russian forces. The Third Reich’s impressive dedication, understated here of course, to their core values was also reflected in the French’s political ideology- a heavy emphasis on historical achievements of their ancestors and that same achievement being bred into every Frenchman or German. Upon discussing hindering ideologies, these two regimes are similar in this way as well. However, where the Nazi Regime and the Third Republic differ is in their commitment to its people, those evacuating their regions headed westward in the case of Breslauers and southwards in the case of many Parisians. The social implications of this lack of leadership are reflected in the evacuees’ memoirs and firsthand accounts of their respective exoduses, which I will discuss in greater detail in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

In a dramatic movement of peoples from one homeland to the next, there will naturally be tension. A resistance to change in ideologies, cultural climate, and concessions made to make room for migrant people. This tension manifests itself in unspoken gestures, like a cold shoulder, a closed door, or a sign with a bold phrase painted across it, and in spoken word. In passing a “comrade” in the street while on your way to work, a hissed derogatory slur hits your ear like a drop of water to a simmering pan as the comrade strides by. You’re unwelcome in every place you move to. “Where have you come from?” is a question that needs no answering, as it is apparent that wherever that place is, is not true Germany. That’s all that matters. In France, every Frenchman is on the road together, fleeing Hitler’s occupation. You’re carrying all that you own in a wheelbarrow while your children wear as many layers of clothing as possible so to save space. Next to you passes an automobile carrying a woman and her most prized possessions. You see China and linens. People and things that have no place being in a massive march towards uncertainty. How can you prepare for something when you don’t even know what it looks like, or what it sounds like, or feels like? How will this end? With the already established military and political motivations and circumstances behind these two exoduses, we are now able to look at the firsthand accounts of the citizens who experienced these events firsthand. Through diary entries, public speeches, and daily interactions with one another, we are able to see these exoduses through the eyes of the people who experienced it themselves. It is then clear to see just how fearful these people were about being invaded and occupied, how they viewed one another ethnically, and how they respond to the realization that the government is in fact not in control of these exoduses as one would have previously been led to believe.

Demographics of Migration

Within both migrations, French and Germanic, there exists the mixing of different ethnic groups and social classes that produces tension and stress. Through novels like *Suite Francaise* by Irene Nemirovsky, the reader metaphorically taken through the roads and travels shoulder to shoulder with the migrating Parisians. Each Parisian in the novel is from a different socio-economic and religious background. As this novel is a historical fiction and not produced directly from specific people's stories, I assert that this perspective is critical to seeing the personal side of this traumatic uprooting of millions of people. As a researcher, it is one thing to see facts and figures and make sense of this movement in a scholarly way and it is absolutely possible to not be impacted by these findings in any way possible. It is an entirely different thing altogether, however, to have the opportunity to not only see the figures and magnitude of the migration of 1940 in an empirical light, but to also experience the migration as close as one can while being separated from it by seventy years' time. It is therefore extremely valuable to pair Nemirovsky's drawn perspectives to diary entries of real French men and women and to see where the matching themes lie.

Within the French migration, there are various nationalities, different religions, and different socio-economic demographics present. In light of the German invasion of Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands in May 1940, people of those nationalities who could flee southwest through the northern part of France and down towards Paris and onward to the Free Zone, took everything they had and tried to catch any mode of transportation that was available. "No one anticipated the enormous number of refugees that flooded into France. Most simply

wanted to escape the bombs,” (Diamond, 29). Interestingly enough, while these people were of different nationality from one another, French and Dutch, Belgian, etc., there grew a suspicion amongst those fleeing that they could not trust the person in step next to them, even though they were fleeing the same German Army.

Modes of transportation quickly became increasingly difficult to use or come by, as petrol for vehicles could not easily be found on the roads headed southward and trains were only able to carry so many people at one time. Then the issue exists of where to go if you don’t have any family to stay with? Conditions on the roads were perilous, not only due to the impending German air attacks, but also due to the lack of food, lack of shelter as inns were filled nightly or there wasn’t enough space or money to pay for a room, and the growing tension that comes with desperate times (Diamond, 67). Theft became a serious issue on the roads. People were in real danger of being stolen from in the night or while their possessions were momentarily left unattended. Petrol was siphoned from other vehicles’ gas tanks. People were taken advantage of when the social structure collapsed in the midst of a chaotic event such as this exodus (Diamond, 75).

Upon discussing the demographics of the German migration of 1945, the majority of the people departing through Breslau are not only Germans from the city, but also Germans from neighboring countries such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Austria to name a few. These people were all fleeing the invading Russian Red Army. With ethnic Germans moving

from one location to another within 3 years (1942-1945, with the expansion of Germany), a sense of home or “*heimat*”⁶ was not established, leaving German people with a loss of identity.

View Towards Occupation and Invasion

In France, the Fifth Column became one of the major factors that contributed to the heightened fear and animosity towards other people within the exoduses. French government officials define the Fifth Column as a movement that served to undermine French success in the War, making the Fifth Column “responsible”⁷ for France’s defeat and hardships. Not only did propaganda facilitate and perpetuate the fear that defined the French morale, it was aided even further by historical Prussian invasions, dating back as recently as 1870 and 1918. A woman remembers her evacuation when she was 14 years old; “We left because we saw the others leaving and we were afraid of the Germans. My mother had lived through 1914-18 and was very afraid: ‘we can’t stay here’ ‘we can’t stay here’⁸,” (Diamond, 31). As stated in the previous chapters, war memory and the memory of the past German invasions play a haunting role in the fear that grew within the fleeing French people. “It was the presence of Allied soldiers (mostly French) caught up amongst the civilians which drew the Germans to bomb and machine-gun the columns of fleeing civilians. These soldiers and refugees on the open roads were easy targets, allowing the Germans to create panic with maximum effect,” (Diamond, 30). The German army knew full well the traditional connection to memory and history that French people have, and so they were able to use that in order to inflict the most fear. Similarly, the Russian Red Army did the same to the German civilians when the German Army was in retreat. With raping and pillaging newly captured

⁶ *heimat*, according to the Oxford Dictionary is German for “home or homeland”

⁷ Taken from the French President, Reynaud’s declarations (Oxford University Press: New York, 2007) pg. 79.

⁸ Mme Asquin, interview with the author [Hannah Diamond] (Amiens, April 2005) pg. 31

German towns, Russians left their mark as ruthless ‘Mongols.’ With this reputation, “and the Russians at the gates, the civilian population [of East Prussia] did not wait for orders: ‘Almost nowhere did a timely and organized evacuation take place, on the contrary the departure of the East Prussian population constituted a disorderly flight which was triggered at the last moment and which was completely chaotic,” (Bessel, 73). Thus, with stories like that of the appalling desecration of the city of Nemmersdorf in October 1944 by the Red Army, news and propaganda posters of Russia’s mutilation of Germans spread like wildfire across the German Empire, spurring on a new fear of invasion and occupation.

Similarities and Differences

These migrations catalyzed already present ethnic and social tensions within both societies. They also made each society question their own government’s motivations, capabilities, and underlying agendas while in the midst of WWII. In regards to the two governments’ preparations for an event such as a migration of millions of people, the hitch rests in the fact that neither of the two nations considered that to be proactive, instead it was considered weak. “Suggestions that the evacuation of large numbers of people might be necessary were simply dismissed as a defeatist position, out of line with the aura of confidence that surrounded all planning for the impending hostilities,” (Diamond, 18). People began to lose confidence in their governments once they realized that there would be no concessions to aid their current situation, or I should say, when there is impending defeat approaching rapidly. The differences fall where the issue of preparation is concerned. On both accounts, the building up of infrastructure would have been necessary in order to have been better able to conduct the flow of people to the southern part of France and the Western parts of the then German Empire. Even in this statement it is worth

noting that the distances of which the Germans had to travel in comparison to the French people are arguably much greater on average, as minority Germans in the far East had to cross multiple countries in order to get to a safe zone, whereas a vast majority of the French stayed in France. “In the capital, the police distributed tracts recommending people make their own arrangements to leave immediately in the event of air attack. They were urged to go to country homes or to find accommodation with extended family. In 1940 many city dwellers were only one generation removed from the country side. Relatively recent urbanization meant that most Parisian families still had relatives in the provinces,” (Diamond, 23). This provides a sense of security that many people in Germany did not have, as their removal from heimat proved to be detrimental to the identification of “home.” In addition to the distance disparity, there exists the incredibly weighty factor of climate. The French migration occurred in May of 1940, which did prove to be ‘unbearably’ hot and did cause some deaths from dehydration and exposure to the elements while on the roads. However, the German migration occurred in February of 1945, which caused many Germans to flee quickly in the dead of winter. Exposure to the elements caused people to literally freeze to death. The death rate is estimated to be one of 500,000 to 600,000 people total, including foreign workers and civilians who died while fleeing in Germany and the death rate in France is estimated to be 100,000 among refugees (Diamond, 143).

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Findings and Applications

Two peoples of differing ideologies, political agendas, and social constructions are put in frighteningly similar conditions and are left with dramatically different results. The goal with this research is to find the link between the social or cultural structure of a society and the political agendas of regimes and in so doing, prove how this relationship is imperative to determining the success or failure of mobilizing a people during chaotic environments. My hope would be that this research could then be applied to current wartime refugee evacuation trauma, such as the crisis in Syria. Alan Ball writes that, “Life is infinitely complex, and I feel like we live in a culture that really seems to simplify it into sound bites and bromides, and that does not work.”

In this research, it would be easy to simplify actors in these migrations. For example, not all Germans supported Hitler. In fact, many citizens did not share in his ideology, just enjoyed the economic and nationalistic benefits of the Nazi state for a short while. So to say that all Germans were Nazis is a falsity. Loaded words such as “Nazi” and “Allied Power” that only suffice in a simple history fail to accurately describe events surrounding WWII, specifically the exoduses. When starting this research I have to constantly remind myself of this, as this research is challenging my own preconceived notions of history. There aren’t set themes that outline the causes and effects of each wartime migration around the world. There are impeccable similarities between the French and German migrations, but apparent differences due to unique memories of war.

Can you be a powerful nation economically and politically and prepare their infrastructure for a massive displacement of people? Through this research I have concluded that a nation could prepare infrastructure for wartime chaos, much like America did with our highway system during the Cold War, but I do not believe that a powerful hegemonic nation will. In today's politics it is very much oriented to the image of a nation. How strong to you portray yourself to be, or how strategic are you about getting other nations to ally with you to cover your debt or military shortcomings. Should a hegemonic power be preparing for a possible defeat if there is an uprising challenging nation who could easily take military or economic hegemony away from said current world leader? As a civilian who would be experiencing these chaotic events firsthand, I would be supportive of such an investment into our infrastructure. However, as an American with an investment in our international image and current status as the hegemonic power, I see the benefits of maintaining that image of being powerful and unwilling to even consider defeat. This issue is one that should be pursued further and I value these moments in history that truly allow us to look at something so unchanging as the human instinct to protect itself but place it in the context of time, enculturation, and war. These moments will continue to reveal more to the current generation of leaders about the human inclinations and desires from their governments during chaos.

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